

## Early Baptists in Hampshire.

**T**HOMAS COLLIER had the honour of being blamed in 1646 as having "done much hurt at Lymington, Hampton, and all along the West Country." A year earlier he had founded a Baptist church at Poole, and he now had two assistant evangelists, John Sims and [? Peter] Row. Guildford, Portsmouth, Bishop's Waltham, Upottery, Westbury Leigh, North Bradley, were scenes of his activity. In 1653 there was a general movement among Baptists to organize into churches and associations, and two years later the Western Association drew its eastern boundary to include Dalwood, Lyme, Upottery, but to exclude Hampshire.

On June 3, 1655, one hundred and eleven Baptists living in twenty villages of Wilts and Hants met at Birdlymes in Porton, the residence of Colonel John Reade, late governor of Poole, and organized as one church. They drew up elaborate rules, and recognized as joint pastors Reade, Walter Pen, Edward Bundy; to these they added three more, and two deacons. Some account of this wide-spread community will be found in the first volume of our *Transactions*, at page 56, drawn from the first church book, which ends with 1685. But there is more to be said, even as to the early days, about the Baptists up the Avon, the Test, and the Itchen.

Thus on the west of the New Forest there were groups at Christchurch, Ringwood, Fordingbridge, Downton, Salisbury, Amesbury, Bulford, Rushall, Devizes, with Marlborough across the watershed on the Kennett. In 1669 it was reported to the Bishop of Winchester that at the hamlets of Hordle and Milford, between Christchurch and Lymington, there were three little companies meeting, whose leaders were Edward Currell, Richard Gillingham, one Cole, and Robert Ellyott, a silkman of Christchurch; the leader at Fordingbridge was not named. The Cole in question was perhaps Peter Cole of Downton who took a licence for his house at Honiton in 1672; at the same time licences were taken for Salisbury, Stowport, Porton, Amesbury and Bulford, revealing as preachers in those parts James Wise of Salisbury, John Reade, Thomas Long of Amesbury, Henry Sharpwell, Henry Pen of Broadchalk.

At Lymington a licence was taken by Robert Tutchin junior, son of a Presbyterian minister, and described as a Presbyterian. But that same year he was fined two shillings for

a disturbance, and Mr. King in his *Old Times of Lymington Revisited*, comments that he was a Baptist, and father of the man who compiled the Western Martyrology.

In the valley of the Test, the bishop heard of three Baptist meetings at Southampton, entertained by Richard King, Thomas Trod, and William Harding senior. Three years later, Harding and King took out licences, King to preach in his own house, Harding in any licensed house. By a mistake far too frequent in the office, they were both called Presbyterian. And by another mistake in reading a flourished capital, King has been generally called Ring in all Baptist histories. At Romsey, the house of John Wight was licensed, at Broughton the house of Henry Abbott. At Over Wallop, where the bishop thought there were only forty Anabaptists served by vagabond runabout preachers, licences were taken for the house of John Kent, and John Alchurch as preacher. At Whitchurch the house of John Dozell was licensed, with Richard Bunny of Stoke as preacher; and he took another licence for his own house at St. Mary Bourne. Across the Downs, the bishop heard of Nash at Newnham; but this place was more in touch with Reading and Wokingham.

East of the Itchen, one Post of Botley was reported to the bishop as preaching to twenty or thirty Baptists at Droxford; and in three years Edward Goodyears of Bishop's Waltham took a licence for his house. Portsmouth was really linked with Chichester, and the only Baptist church here was general, one of the few that survive to the present day, Unitarian now.

The Declaration of Indulgence in 1672 gave an opportunity for the church to re-organize, and on February 22, 1672/3, another general meeting was held, when it was reported that Penn and Cole had long been in jail; Reade, Penn and Thomas Long of Amesbury were chosen pastors. On the last day of the year 1674/5, Reade was appointed to attend the Assembly convened in London for May. Nine months later, Henry Pen of Chalk and John Kent of Wallop were added to the pastors. A fire having done much damage at Broughton, the church met at Salisbury and voted £24 to relieve distress; this speaks well for the strength in the hamlet, and for the liberality of the church.

The Assembly at Bristol in 1679 proved rather sticklish for form, and actually advised that Reade, Penn and Long be ordained by imposition of hands. So after more than twenty years ministry, they received this outward and visible sign. The meeting, however, caused a record, useful to us, that the regular meeting-places were now Basingstoke, Andover, Salisbury (where rent had been paid since 1657) and Devizes; also that the

cause at Fordingbridge was independent of this church. Four years later, Stephen Kent was chosen another pastor, and he with Richard Kent shepherded the flock near Whitchurch. On January 17, 1685/6, four people were baptized at Wallop, and the first book ends with the record that after all the persecutions there were still ninety members.

The Declaration of Indulgence in 1687 encouraged Richard King to notify the authorities of Southampton that he intended to use the house of John Greenwood for regular preaching. After the Toleration Act had made the situation legal, a general meeting was called in London of all churches approving the 1677 revision of the Westminster Confession, which was republished for the occasion. King and Greenwood went, the two Kents, Joseph Brown and John Lillington from Christchurch, besides a fine group from Wiltshire. They reported another church at Ringwood.

It was felt in some quarters that a wide-spread church was inconvenient, and as there had been misunderstandings between Pen and Reade, only dispelled by arbitration, a general church meeting was held at Salisbury on December 9, 1690, when the members in that city were allowed to organize as a separate church under Walter Pen. They began a new book with a record of that fact, noting that the country members, with Reade as their pastor, might settle for themselves where they would meet. It proved, however, that they preferred to crystallize into three more churches, Whitchurch under the Kents, Southampton under King, Porton and Broughton under Reade. Evidently all four of these churches might equally claim to have a continuous history from 1655 at latest. Whitchurch has a fine series of documents from 1656 to 1852, Broughton has church books from 1699, but the Salisbury book of 1690 has been lost, and everything at Southampton prior to 1790.

Associations were re-arranged in 1690, and the Wiltshire churches joined the Western. While the great debt owed to John Reade was recognized in keeping up meetings in "The Hall" at Porton, yet it is clear that most of the members preferred to meet at Broughton, though collections were taken alternately at the two places. In 1693 John Rumsey was ordained at Lymington, Benjamin Keach coming down for the purpose. When his pastorate ended, we find Joseph Bermester the leading delegate thence to the Association at Ringwood in 1701. The Association met regularly at the various churches, within the county, but always chose Broughton rather than Porton. By 1696 ground broken at Gosport proved so fertile that John Webbar, perhaps of a Tiverton Baptist family, was settled as pastor of a new

church. His activity soon provoked the Presbyterians, and led up to a series of lectures by them on infant baptism. King went over to take notes, and feeling ran so high that in 1699 a full-dress debate was held at Portsmouth, three on each side, with the governor and the mayor present. King took a shorthand report which was transcribed, and the printed book attained a good circulation. Within five years a meeting-house was built on the West Dock Field at Portsmouth, the stone being brought from the ruins of Netley Abbey. This was the beginning of the orthodox Baptist churches round the harbour, John Lacy being the first pastor, from 1732 till his death in 1781. Their history has been compiled by F. Ridoutt, and published in 1888; it had few points of contact with the inland churches of the county.

Broughton was far the most important church at this time, as is shown by the fact that when Portsmouth needed £100 to buy its premises, and the largest local gift was £5, the total London subscription £29, Broughton gave £45. This must be credited largely to the influence of Henry Steele, baptized in 1680 at the age of twenty-six. Nineteen years later he was ordained pastor, King and Richard Kent laying hands on him. He gave two cottages and a burial ground, while his brother Thomas re-modelled the cottages into a meeting-house. The brothers were timber merchants, and bought warships to break up; the oak of the *Royal Sovereign* may yet be seen giving a most unusual and handsome appearance to this rural place of worship. In 1704 it was decided that Broughton and Wallop should form one church; six years later the last collection was taken at Porton, and the link with the birthplace was severed.

Southampton in 1707 received Stephen Kent from Whitchurch, though King was still senior pastor in 1715. From this time the sea-port church fell on bad days; we can trace a meeting-house in Blue Anchor Lane, and some small endowments, but the church ceased to attend Association or to correspond with its neighbours, and with 1764 regular worship was dropped. The resuscitation with 1769 and the revival with the help of Steadman of Broughton, lie beyond the limits here adopted.

Whitchurch tried to tempt Richard Adams from Devonshire Square, but the letters printed in our *Transactions*, ii., 161, show that he was unwilling to come. It was 1714 before Edward Mumford was induced to come from Horsley Down. He was followed seven years later by John Grant from Broughton, who encouraged them to build, so that in 1726 they registered with the Bishop of Winchester a new meeting-house on Wood Street. The effort of paying for it, how-

ever, was such that they said they could not maintain a pastor, and Grant left for Coventry. Their forefathers preferred a minister who could build up a church; they preferred to build a meeting-house and starve a minister. Benjamin Briton followed, then an aged minister named Hopkins who died in 1757. When Charles Cole came from Bradford two years later, there were but thirteen members. The Benhams, however, were liberal, and a new meeting-house was erected on Bear Hill Street in 1777. Cole had a long pastorate of 55 years, acceded to the wish of some people at Longparish, and after preaching there for four years, started them in 1764 with a house of their own.

The westerly causes slowly decayed. Christchurch lingered on, but nothing is known of it except that no meeting-house was ever erected, and the last pastor was a stocking-weaver named Lester, living about 1765: it died soon after he did. At Ringwood Nathaniel Lane lived till 1715, but so old and poor seven years earlier that Barbican in London sent him help. In 1728 the church consulted the London ministers as to calling Caleb Jope, and was warned against him. After that it slowly died. In the heart of the Forest is Lyndhurst, but the church there had adopted General Baptist views, and was ignored by the others: evidently it was an offshoot of Downton, where Henry Miller did good work for many years. With the death of George Jackman in 1755, Lyndhurst also sank into torpor, only to be aroused after a quarter of a century by Aldridge of Downton. Fordingbridge had Thomas Eastham in 1715, and disappears soon afterwards from Baptist life. Lymington persuaded Richard Chalk to come to them from Salisbury in 1705, and then for sixty years had no history, except that John Voysey succeeded Chalk in 1746.

The only live church was Broughton. Thomas Steele had a son William, who was an energetic treasurer, and kept on with new plans which made the people subscribe. His uncle Henry trained preachers, sending Grant to Whitchurch, and himself went preaching, so that William had to raise funds to pay supplies. Naturally then, on the death of Henry in 1739, the nephew succeeded him. He was not satisfied with the work of the General Baptists at Downton, and sent Jacob Taunton to start a Particular Baptist Church there. The family was rich, and cultured, and in William's daughter Anne it made a great gift to the denomination. Anne Dutton of Great Gransden was a most constant letter-writer, as our pages have shown; but she did good service in stirring up Anne Steele. The writings of "Theodosia" and those of "One who has tasted that the Lord is gracious" are a good illustra-

tion of the contrast in Proverbs, "Every wise woman buildeth her house; but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands." Anne Steele's hymns are sung still by people of many communions; the diatribes of Anne Dutton are antiquarian curiosities. The Bible used by both in succession is one of the literary treasures at Broughton. William Steele guided the church successfully through the bad years of the century, and lived to see James Fanch of Romsey enter on a campaign that re-vivified older churches, and planted many new.

W. T. WHITLEY.

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## Welsh Baptists till 1653.

THE religious developments in Wales between 1639 and 1669 have been most carefully investigated by Mr. Thomas Richards, M.A., of the Secondary School at Maesteg. He has studied manuscripts at Oxford, Lambeth, the Record Office, the Museum, Sion College, the House of Lords; while scores of printed works are catalogued as further sources. The value of his work has been recognized by the National Eisteddfods of 1918 and 1921 awarding prizes for two works. And he has placed English readers under deep obligations by publishing in English. The first volume is in print as "A History of the Puritan Movement in Wales from the institution of the church at Llanfaches in 1639 to the expiry of the Propagation Act in 1653." Arrangements for publishing the second are pretty well advanced. Meantime we take advantage of the author's permission to use the first volume freely. First we present a summary of his conclusions in general; then we select the chief facts relating to Baptists, who played quite a minor part at this period.

The first stage of the Puritan revolution in Wales lasted till March 25, 1650. During that period there had been two civil wars, of forty-two months and of five months. The two Houses of Parliament and the committee for Plundered Ministers dealt very freely with parishes at that time, in Wales as in England; and details are given of 132 ministers who were installed afresh or were approved by their authority. They diverted the revenues of sinecure livings to maintain a preaching ministry; they provided suitable spheres of labour for the Puritans of the Llanfaches school; they acknowledged